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The Wounded CIA

For the CIA, the Administration shake-up could not have come at a worse moment. During several months of nearly nonstop hearings, a dozen Congressional committees have unloaked the agency's darkest secrets and revealed a tale of assassination plots, links to organized crime, illegal spying on U.S. citizens and downright incompetence. Though the termination of director William Colby had long been anticipated, the appointment of so political a figure as former Republican National Committee Chairman George Bush stunned an agency that had expected a nonpolitical member of the establishment to replace Colby. Said one senior CIA veteran who visited the agency's headquarters in Langley, Va., last week: "It was like seeing a patient being wheeled out of surgery in shock—eyes open, shallow breathing, compos mentis but nothing more."

What the agency had been through this year seemed to some nothing less than a wholesale blood-letting—covers blown, morale shattered and contacts with foreign intelligence agencies jeopardized. According to senior officials, the CIA is now working at barely three-quarters speed, and though it has undertaken no official damage assessment—as it does routinely when an agent defects or when a covert operation is compromised—even some of the CIA's most persistent gadflies are concerned that the damage may be substantial and irreparable.

The lingering chance that CIA officers will be prosecuted for, among other things, opening the mail of U.S. citizens has "scared the bejeezus out of them," according to one source—and the Congressional scrutiny has offended their traditional sense of high mission and self-esteem. "They feel they had been trying to serve their country," one official explained, "and now the bastards are trying to hang them for it." There is the additional fear that, in its zeal to rein in the agency, Congress may begin cutting funds—and jobs.

THE COLD SHOULDER

Public exposure has also undermined the CIA's relations with foreign intelligence agencies, who are no longer certain their secrets will be safe in U.S. hands. "None of them can understand our propensity to publish everything," explains Ray Cline, the CIA's former Deputy Director of Intelligence.

Many governments have no alterna-

tive but trust, since they benefit from U.S. aid and military hardware, but Great Britain has reportedly begun to give the CIA documents on a loan-only basis to keep them from disclosure by Congress, and some governments have stopped revealing their sources and methods of getting intelligence, which makes their information more difficult to evaluate. Explained one agency topsider: "The Japanese may give us a report on what happened inside the Chinese politburo. But unless they tell us whether this comes from an agent they have on the politburo—or from some bum on a Peking street corner—we have no way of knowing how good their information is."

Another apparent side effect of making the CIA public has been an increased reluctance on the part of U.S. multinational companies to provide covers for operatives ostensibly in their employ—and to serve as a conduit for money that needs to be washed to pay for covert operations. Many companies are still cooperative about funneling information to the agency from their own contacts, but publicity from the likes of Philip Agee, a former operative who named some corporations in his "Inside the Company: A CIA Diary," has made them increasingly shy about more direct involvement—perhaps with reason. Only last week, the Senate committee headed by Idaho Democrat Frank Church released its report on the National Security Agency's Project Shamrock, which confirmed that three cable companies—ITT, RCA and Western Union—had helped the NSA monitor overseas cable traffic until last May. The American Civil Liberties Union has brought a multimillion-dollar class-action suit against the three as well as others.

A CLOAK OF SILENCE

Many CIA agents acknowledge the cover problem has not yet reached major proportions, but with the number of U.S. military installations around the world dwindling, the alternatives to corporate covers have markedly diminished. State Department jobs for CIA people in foreign embassies, considered "shallow" cover at best, have about run out; on a recent trip to the Middle East, one Senate staffer found three foreign-service officers in the economic section of an American embassy—and eighteen U.S. spies.

The only cure for this multitude of ills, agency partisans insist, is for the CIA to wrap itself in its old cloak of anonymity and silence until the wounds heal—and they fear that with a politician like Bush as director, that cannot happen. Bush has always been known for making the best of thankless jobs—as ambassador to the United Nations when China was admitted; as Republican National Committee chairman during the last climactic months of Watergate; and most recently as chief of the tenuous U.S. liaison office in Peking. His skill is generally respected, but his political ambitions, it is feared, could conflict with his duties at CIA. "You want someone who can stand apart in that job," says one old CIA hand. "If he is a friend of the President's, and if the President's policy is détente, what would he do with information that the Soviets aren't as serious about détente as we think they are?"

Critics as well as friends of the U.S. intelligence establishment share a desire to restore its sources, morale and even secrecy when necessary, and have advocated a number of measures to accomplish that—while guarding against a repeat of past abuses. Some of the reforms most talked about:

Modification of covert operations: In the heat of the disclosures, many people urged that the agency abandon all covert operations, but now that idea has faded. Congress will undoubtedly want to reduce their number, but as one senior CIA official put it, the President needs "something between war and peace." More attention has also been focused on Cabinet-level officials who order such operations. A special grievance of some CIA officials was that Henry Kissinger, as both Secretary of State and national security czar, could push through a clandestine project virtually by himself. Whether Kissinger's replacement as NSC chief by his deputy, Lt. Gen. Brent Scow-